

The Borromeo Goes the Distance to Bring Music Over the Miles

Contributed by
Barri Lynn Moreau.

Using Maine's ATM network
to get MUSIC, not money

The German poet Goethe described a string quartet as “a conversation with four educated people.” What a conversation the Borromeo String Quartet began in May with students and teachers at nine distance-learning sites throughout Maine!

The conversation was the result of a year-long discussion between Distance Learning Network (DLN) specialists from Maine's Department of Education (MDOE) in collaboration with PCA Great Performances' 75th anniversary celebration events.

PCA Great Performances wanted to extend the reach of its educational programming as “thank you” to its founding members and music teachers with a week-long string residency. One of the goals of the residency was to create as many opportunities as possible for students and teachers to interact with the quartet and to hear them play.

Maine's DLN wanted to push the boundaries of its Asynchronous Transmission Mode (ATM) system with a new initiative. The network includes 91 sites throughout Maine's 16 counties. Using ATM technology, people in the farthest regions of the state are linked together for meetings, professional development opportunities and academic courses.

DLN specialist Steve Vose worked with and trained PCA Great Performances' Director of Education Barri Lynn Moreau to offer this unique music education opportunity on May 9, 2006. Barbara Moody from MDOE helped set up the room for sound checks and served as assistant director for the broadcast.

Luckily, the Borromeo String Quartet has experience using this kind of technology. They presented a program over a similar network in Hawaii a few years back. Nick Kitchen, the quartet's first violin and “tekkie whiz,” was eager to broadcast the history of the string quartet presentation across Maine and give students the chance to interact with the quartet.



THE BORROMEO STRING QUARTET. PHOTO BY LIZ LINDER.

Pineland Suzuki students from around Augusta were the “in-house” audience, but the larger audience included Waterville High School, Bangor High School and Mount Desert Island High School—all linked interactively with the quartet. In addition, Lewiston Regional High School, Ellsworth High School, Narraguagus High School and Washington Academy received the broadcast. Students had opportunities to see and speak to each other in various schools around the state and were also able to talk to members of the quartet.

Although there were the usual slight technical glitches, the program was well received. Students rated it as “Great!” A 12th-grade music student from

Waterville High School says, “I was very impressed with the quartet's presentation. These were clearly four musicians who loved what they do . . . and loved sharing it with others. Being exposed to this performance has helped me greatly as a musician.”

Music educators were thrilled with the presentation and the opportunity for students to be coached by the string quartet. “In the Augusta area, where we have very few chances to hear such great music, it was an especially unique treat,” says Betsy Kobayashi, Pineland Suzuki director.

“To have programs like this gives students the excitement to go on. Most of the students are

the only one in their school who play a string instrument, and it is not always the cool thing to do. Borromeo was definitely cool. I am sure that they made many new friends for chamber music,” Kobayashi says.

One parent marveled at the change in her son's technique and self-confidence after the Borromeo experience. “My 13-year-old son was able to participate in the ‘studio audience’ during the lecture/demonstration, and then attend a master class. He really enjoyed it, and said he couldn't wait to go to school and tell people about it.”

According to this parent, the session had a real impact on her son's playing. “Yesterday afternoon at an informal solo recital, he played the Bach Gavotte he had played for the quartet earlier in the day, and he had already incorporated their suggestions regarding telling a story, leading the dance and the ‘pinky circles.’ ”

A second day of residency activities in Augusta was followed by two more days of events throughout Maine, concluding with a free Borromeo String Quartet concert in Portland's Merrill Auditorium. The auditorium was packed with 1,200 new “friends” of the Borromeo String Quartet, including residency participants from the capital area.

The entire residency was underwritten by the generosity of the Evenor Armington Fund, the Vincent B. and Barbara G. Welch Foundation and the Fisher Charitable Foundation. Based on the success of the residency, PCA Great Performances is looking forward to a future residency with the Borromeo String Quartet to support Maine ASTA string and music education programs throughout Maine. 📷

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Maine Department of Education Hires Argy Nestor as the New Visual & Performing Arts Consultant

Position That Was Eliminated in Budget Cuts
More Than 10 Years Ago Now Reinstated

Argy Nestor has been selected as the new visual and performing arts consultant for the Maine Department of Education (MDOE). This is great news for arts education in Maine—a knowledgeable, articulate arts education leader working within the MDOE to strengthen arts education for Maine students.



Argy has taught visual art at D.R. Gaul Middle School in Union, Maine, for more than 20 years, and was Maine Teacher of the Year in 1995 and previously served as a Maine Alliance for Arts Education (MAAE) board member.

“What an honor to be selected for the Department of Education Arts position,” Nestor said. “I look forward to working with the arts educators and organizations throughout the state of Maine to advance the quality of education and delivery of instruction in the arts!”

Valerie Seaberg, team leader for MDOE, said of Nestor's hiring, “We are so pleased that Argy will be serving in the capacity of the visual and performing arts specialist. She brings significant experience and highly regarded expertise to the position. Argy will provide great leadership in this very important and unique state level role in arts education.”

MAAE and the organizations of the Arts are Basic Coalition have advocated for the reinstatement of this position at MDOE since it was eliminated in budget cuts more than 10 years ago.

Carol Trimble, executive director of MAAE said she and her colleagues are grateful for the support of Governor John Elais Baldacci, First Lady Karen Baldacci, and Education Commissioner Susan Gendron, “in ensuring that arts education is represented in the Maine Department of Education. And thanks to our many members for your continued support as we've all worked together to advocate for this position in the Maine Department of Education.”

“I look forward to working with Argy when she begins this new job in August,” added Trimble. 📷